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UNITED NATIONS REFORM: MEASURES AND PROPOSALS

Disarmament

Note by the Secretariat

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1. In its resolution 37/99 K of 13 December 1982, the General Assembly, as a reflection of the central role and primary responsibility that Member States assigned to the United Nations in the field of disarmament, called for the establishment of a Department for Disarmament Affairs. Consistent with the legislative mandate emanating from that resolution and in the spirit of giving greater visibility to the Organization's mandate in this area, the Secretary-General, in his report entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950), indicated his intention to place the United Nations disarmament programme under a department to be headed by an Under-Secretary-General. This action, as suggested in the report, would effect a managerial reorganization of Secretariat capacities to respond to the priorities of Member States.

2. The end of the cold war has opened opportunities that should lead to more decisive international efforts in the field of disarmament. Weapons of mass destruction continue to be of primary importance despite significant progress achieved to outlaw chemical and biological weapons and to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regimes. Nuclear disarmament must therefore be pursued more vigorously, particularly by the nuclear-weapon States, with a view to the progressive reduction and complete elimination of nuclear weapons at the earliest possible date. At the same time, the international community has been increasingly concerned with the spread of conventional weapons, especially in relation to landmines and small arms which are used extensively in regional and subregional conflicts.

3. In this connection, it is noted that the programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997, as approved by the General Assembly, stated that efforts in the promotion of arms limitation and disarmament were focused "on weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear ones", but were becoming "increasingly concerned with the growth and proliferation of various types of conventional weapons".[1]

4. The proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 maintains this same approach. It states:

> "The main focus during the biennium 1998-1999 will be on weapons of mass destruction, notably nuclear weapons. Their systematic and progressive reduction, with the ultimate goal of complete elimination, remains a priority task of the international community. At the same time, the disturbingly high number of conflicts in various subregions of the world has called attention to the destabilizing effects and the destructive power of conventional arms, especially of the uncontrolled flow and accumulation of small arms. The need to curb their proliferation and to promote confidence-building measures, openness and transparency in all spheres of the military activities of States at the global, regional and subregional levels is increasingly recognized."[2]

5. In line with this statement, in the revised programme estimates submitted on 11 September 1997 (A/52/303) it is noted that the emergence of new dangers and actors has added fresh urgency to the tasks that the United Nations is called upon to play in the area of disarmament.

6. The establishment of the department takes fully into account current trends and developments and, in particular, Member States' expressed interest in finding ways to address them. It does not, however, detract from the main focus of the Organization's activities in the area of disarmament which, as currently mandated, will continue to be on weapons of mass destruction.

7. In this connection, it is recalled that in resolution 51/45 C of 10 December 1996, the General Assembly decided, subject to the emergence of a consensus on its objective and agenda, to convene its fourth special session devoted to disarmament in 1999. As indicated in the fifth preambular paragraph of the resolution, such a special session would "offer an opportunity to review, from a perspective more in tune with the current international situation, the most critical aspects of the process of disarmament". Furthermore, as stated in the eighth preambular paragraph, the special session could "set the future course of action in the field of disarmament, arms control and related security matters".

8. Should the General Assembly decide to convene the fourth special session, a priority task for the department would be to assist Member States, in every way possible, in the process leading to the convening of that session. Beyond the existing disarmament programme, the department will provide a structure capable of carrying out such emerging mandates as Member States may entrust to the Organization. Any adjustments from the current programme would only result from the successful conclusion of negotiations in the appropriate multilateral forums.

9. The Conference on Disarmament is the single global disarmament negotiating forum and has a unique relationship with the United Nations. The Secretary-General of the Conference also acts as the personal representative of the Secretary-General by whom he is appointed and to whom he reports directly on matters pertaining to the work of the Conference. Providing staff support to, and servicing of the Conference on Disarmament is one of the major functions of the existing Secretariat capacity in the field of disarmament in Geneva. Such capacity will be maintained at the present levels as an integral part of the new structure.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/50/6/Rev.1), para. 2.81.

[2] Ibid., Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 6 (A/52/6/Rev.1), para. 2.121.